

We will spend the next few weeks looking at some texts from 1st and 2nd Samuel. First and Second Samuel were originally one book and they tell us about the beginning of the monarchy in Israel. This Old Testament book was split into two books when it was translated from Hebrew, the language that the Old Testament was written in, into Greek, the language of the New Testament. This original Greek translation of the Old Testament is called the Septuagint.

The period of history that we are looking into is sometime around 1200 BC to 1000 BC. The book of 1st Samuel is split into 3 sections. The first section is focused on the character of Samuel. Samuel is considered a transitional figure. He is the last of the judges that ruled Israel and a prophet that anoints Saul to be king and begin the monarchy.

The text we will be reading explains why Israel shifted from being ruled by judges into being ruled by kings. As we will see in our reading, the Israelites got tired of being unique and they wanted to be just like everyone else. Samuel will warn them about becoming like everyone else and why that is not such a good thing.

But alas they will not listen. They will not listen to Samuel because the people become scared. They become scared because they realize that Samuel is getting old and they see his sons as corrupt. Therefore, the people decide to take matters into their own hands and demand a king just like everyone else.

What is interesting about this story is that in the ancient Near East it was believed that the gods decided who the leaders should be. For instance, in the Code of Hammurabi, the Near Eastern deity Marduk chooses a human king to carry out his tasks. But in the Scripture which we are about to read it is not a deity that initiates the desire for a king but the people.

Read I Samuel 8

So in this reading, the people are tired of being different than every other nation. They want to be just like everyone else. And what is amazing is that God allows them to get what they want. They want a king? "I will let you have a king," God says. "Even though," God says, "you asking for a king is a rejection of me and what I stand for."

I am now going to show a video clip. We have seen videos before from these two behavioral scientists who call themselves the BS guys for Behavioral Scientists. I think that this experiment that we will see helps us to understand about how peer pressure seeks to make us like everyone else and that may not always be a good thing. Let's watch.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gGVeTi3psLc&elqTrackId=1C3765F6927F5BEC0499CB7D693E101B&elq=6d07380d721341059532f4d4df48dc48&elqCampaignId=1802&elqaid=3211&elqat=1>

In the Scripture which we read, God gives up authority and allows the people to take charge of their life. God warns them of what this will mean but God allows them to be manipulated by the fears around them.

And why do the people want a king just like everyone else? They want a king because they fail to trust that God will provide them with what they need. They lose sight of the special relationship that they have with God and they lose sight of how God was and will always be with them. They have an opportunity to completely allow God to be in charge but they just can't do it.

In this story, God will allow them to have a king. Even though they reject God and demand a king, God does not abandon them. In fact, Solomon and then David become great kings in many ways. God's grace always triumphs.

But I think this video and this story reminds us of how easily we can be persuaded to act in ways that show a distrust in God's will. But not always. What I love about this video is that there were some teenagers who had a strong enough belief system in what is important that they stood firm for the right thing. These teenagers believed strongly enough in what was right that they stood up for it.

Maybe you are facing some temptations in your life right now. And maybe you are wondering if the grass really is greener on the other side of the fence. Maybe you are hearing some voices in your life that are enticing you to do something that you may know is not the right thing to do.

But as you encounter these voices that are inviting you into an unethical way of being, I invite you to remember the story that we read today and the video which we watched. You can be the one to trust God to show you the right and ethical way to respond to the situation which you are encountering.

You can be the one to take the more difficult path and stand up for what is right. You can be the one to be a witness as people around you are calling upon you to just be like everyone else.

Last week someone shared with me their story which I think relates very well to what we learn from what we have read and seen today. This person, whom I will call John, was recently fired from his job. John works for a major company and the company laid off 10,000 employees. Since John had only worked for the company for 6 months he was included in the 10,000.

A security guard showed up at his office and John was escorted out of the building with no warning. Those of you who work in major corporations know that this is the way it is done. John's immediate boss was not even aware that John was being fired.

Within 48 hours though John was contacted again by the company. John was told that people that he worked with begged the company to hire him back. The company, therefore, was offering him his old job. So I want to pause at this point and ask you to think about what you would do at this point.

What would other people do? What would one be expected to do at this point? What would be the norm that others have set for how to react at this point? Would you quickly accept the job? Would you throw it back in the employer's face?

This is what John chose to do. John asked to meet with the vice president that made the firing and hiring decision as well as a representative from human relations. John wanted to know how the decision was made and what would be his long term viability with the company.

Then John did something which you are not expected to do in corporate America. John asked these two company representatives if he could lead them in a prayer. John prayed in this corporate office for the courage to forgive the ones who fired him and John prayed for wisdom in making the decision about whether or not to return to the company.

You do not have to be like everyone else. You can be different. As you face temptations in your life, don't just go along with the crowd because that is the easy thing to do.

Instead, we are invited to trust God and do the right and moral and ethical action. And as you do the moral and right and ethical act, you may have an opportunity presented to give witness to why you are doing that. AMEN.

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-Text: I Samuel 8:4-22

-Given: June 7, 2015 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)